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An Education in Saving on Textbooks

By Heather Wallace

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Every year students flock to the college bookstore to purchase the various textbooks that they require for their classes. Little do these students realize that, in doing so, they are throwing good money away. As unbelievable as it may seem textbooks, in some cases, actually cost as much, if not more, than tuition.

On the surface the college bookstore may seem like a convenient source for textbooks. Titles are usually in-stock and students may purchase new textbooks or opt for the cheaper alternative of used books. In truth the money saved by purchasing used textbooks from the college bookstore is only a fraction of the amount that students could be saving if they shopped online.

More and more online booksellers have begun selling textbooks at a considerable discount off of the cover price. In fact, many major booksellers now have special areas of their web sites that are devoted to selling nothing but textbooks. Online used bookstores are another source for college books as they stock a large number of textbooks, which means sizable savings for students. There are also web-based retailers whose inventory is entirely devoted to college books.

Students should avoid purchasing their textbooks at the first store that they browse. Instead, they should investigate the alternatives offered by other online booksellers. Price isn't the only factor to consider when making an online purchase. Students should also factor in shipping costs and delivery time when making their buying decision.

Online auctions are another option for students seeking a bargain. This option, however, has its pros and cons. A plus is that students can get incredible bargains when obtaining books via online auctions. One downside is that established retailers have channels in place to ensure that you receive your order within a reasonable amount of time. With an auction purchase, however, you are at the mercy of the auction seller's timetable.

One way that students can really save is by obtaining books for free. Project Gutenberg is one resource that English majors will find invaluable. At this site students can peruse a vast collection of

classics that have entered the public domain. In the past students seeking assistance with their studies had to pay for the privilege of that help by purchasing study guides. Today that is no longer the case. Cash-strapped students can now visit Spark Notes for free downloadable study guides as well as free downloadable classics.

Students who elect to buy online will no longer be able to resell their books to the college bookstore at the end of class, but that doesn't mean that they are stuck with the textbooks. Many web sites that sell textbooks also offer students the option of selling their books to fellow bargain-seekers. This allows students to easily recouping a portion of their money.

Textbooks normally consume a major portion of a student's budget, but that doesn't have to be the case, because while the cost of tuition may be set in stone the price of textbooks isn't. By taking the

time to do a little research on the best textbook values available college students can save money now rather than acquiring debt to be paid back later.

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New High School Is First In Arizona Schools To Have No Textbooks

By Patricia Hawke

Empire High School in Vail, located on the edge of Tucson, is the first in the Arizona schools to be all-electronic. Instead of textbooks, the 350 students use wireless, Apple laptop computers to research, organize their data, write and graph assignments, and create class presentations.

The Arizona schools Empire High is a new school with a blank slate. Arizona schools officials could hire new teachers committed to technology-based teaching and purchase computers instead of textbooks. The Arizona schools officials wanted to move teachers away from habitual teaching from textbooks, cover-to-cover, and gave area students the choice to attend Empire or another school.

Having researched schools in other states prior to the all-electronic decision, Arizona schools officials found students who were clearly more engaged in their studies and unusually enthusiastic about school. One reason was that they took a more active part in the lesson process, rather than everything being "fed" to them. Another advantage to laptops over textbooks is that groundbreaking information takes five to six years to get into textbooks, especially in the science fields. Of the few all-electronic schools across the nation, many are doing well from the perspective of both the students and the educators. The Arizona schools officials clearly felt they could enhance their students' educational experience with technology over textbooks.

An Education in Saving on Textbooks

Replacing textbooks with laptops for other Arizona schools would prove expensive at \$850 each. For Empire, they took the usual \$500 to \$600 cost per student for a complete set of textbooks for four years, as well as the cost of a computer lab, and used this money to purchase the laptops and added technology needs.

Some new challenges had to be faced by the Arizona schools' new Empire High and research was done to address them. They had 350 students, who needed to be continuously and reliably connected to the Internet at high speed. All the laptops had to be configured to best suit the needs of the students for learning. The needed educational material had to be located on the Internet and integrated into lesson plans. A method for students to submit assignments across the Web was needed. These were problems they knew had to be resolved before the school year began.

What the Arizona schools officials had not planned on was a different sort of technological problem. It seems that many students who used home computers for gaming, surfing the Internet, and X-Box, had a difficult time translating these skills to those needed in school, such as using word processing software, saving documents to specific locations, and being able to retrieve the files later. Skills training had to be added to the lesson plans.

For other schools that are interested in setting up an all-electronic school, the Arizona schools officials advise that it must be a public choice. You cannot force such drastic learning changes. Include the parents and teachers in the planning at the ground floor.

After a year, the system is working well overall. The Arizona schools plan to increase enrollment at Empire High to 750 students in the near future.

Patricia Hawke is a staff writer for Schools K-12, providing free, in-depth reports on all U.S. public and private K-12 schools. Patricia has a nose for research and writes stimulating news and views on school issues. For more on Arizona schools visit



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